

## Millionaire businessman ordered to remove Islamic creed in 2ft-high lettering from side of his £750,000 home because council claims it's as 'obtrusive as McDonald's ad'

- **Message reads: 'There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger'**
- **Planners claim the 2ft-high lettering is like McDonald's advertising hoarding**
- **Mahmood Ali, 54, is now facing a legal battle in 'freedom of speech' row**
- **He said: 'The message is simply there to bless the house. It is not an advert'**

By Simon Tomlinson

A millionaire businessman has been ordered to remove an Islamic message from the side of his luxury house because council chiefs say it is advertising, it emerged today.

Mahmood Ali, 54, fell out with planners over the wording, taken from the Arabic creed, which reads: 'There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger'.

Known as shahada, the message declares the belief in the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as his prophet.

The inscription, in 2ft-high green lettering, has been placed across a first-floor archway on his large detached house in a residential street.



'Breaches planning laws': Millionaire businessman Mahmood Ali faces a court battle over this Islamic slogan on his house in Newport, South Wales, after the council ordered it be removed because it is 'advertising'

But he is now in a legal battle with planning chiefs, who classed it as the same as an advertising hoarding like a McDonald's or Marks & Spencer banner.

Mr Ali said: 'The message is simply there to bless the house. The symbols are not an advertisement in any sense of the word's use in daily life.'

'I chose the sign's green colour to reflect the ambiance of the property's character and its surroundings.'

Mr Ali had the sign placed onto the side of his £750,000 eight-bedroom home in Newport, South Wales. But the city's council later decided he didn't have the right planning permission to display the message across the home's stone archway.

The sign, which is around two metres wide and 60cm high, includes the declaration of the Islamic faith, called the Islamic creed.



'Obtrusive': The message, in 2ft-high lettering, is written across a first-floor archway on the large detached house

### **PHRASE DECLARES BELIEF IN ONENESS OF GOD**

The message on the side of Mahmood Ali's house comes from the Islamic creed, known as shahada, which declares the belief in the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as his prophet.

In English, this translates as: 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God' A single, honest recitation of the shahadah in Arabic is all that is required for a person to become a Muslim.

This declaration, or statement of faith, is called the kalimah.

In some sects in Shia Islam, the creed is expanded with the addition of a phrase concerning Ali at the end to say: 'and Ali is the wali (friend) of God'.

Taking this creed is one of the five pillars of Islam.

The complete shahadah cannot be found in the Quran, but comes from hadiths, sayings or tacit approvals ascribed either validly or invalidly to the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Business consultant Mr Ali has also applied for permission to illuminate the sign in low voltage lighting. A family member, who did not wish to be named, added: 'It's our home and we should be free to do whatever we want.

'We're suppose to have freedom of speech in this country and be allowed to express our faith however we please.

'We don't intend to cause any kind of offence but I don't see how it is any different to having a St George's flag hanging outside your home.'

Mr Ali applied for retrospective permission, but it was turned down.

Newport Council have argued that the sign is an obtrusive 'advertisement' according to planning regulations. Under these guidelines, an advertisement includes any word, letter, model, sign, placard, board or notice used for advertising, making an announcement or direction.

A council statement read: 'The property is domestic property and is not a mosque where such signs might be expected.'

'The sign consists of letters and words that announce religious faith and so can be considered to be an advertisement and express planning consent is required.'

'The advertisement is prominently sited upon the host building and is also prominent. Its size and position on the building make it obtrusive.'



Legal fight: A court will now have to decide whether the message should be classed as an advertising hoarding like a McDonald's (above)

A refusal of advertising consent will now be subject to a public hearing in Newport Civic Centre on February 15 after Mr Ali appealed the decision.

The sign has divided opinion among Mr Ali's neighbours on the quiet suburban road. Beryl Morgan, 78, who lives opposite, said: 'Maybe it's OK for a mosque, but I don't think it's a suitable for a house. 'It's not the sort of thing you should be allowed to have on the side of your property. 'It's an eyesore, I don't want to have to look out of my front window and see that every morning. But Joel Davies, 25, said: 'I don't mind it at all. I think he should be free to express his religious preference. 'The sign is very tastefully done, the green lettering looks good against the stonework. I think it adds a bit of colour to the street and I'm not sure what the problem is.'